David Kaczynski

missing parts

I'll start with the premise that a brother shows you who you are—and also who you are not. He's an image of the self, at one remove, but also a representation of the "other."

In a universe of unlimited spatial and temporal dimensions, you are brought together with your brother in a unique and specific consanguinity. You come from the same womb. Your family has a certain flavor or smell unlike any other. It has an ethos, perhaps even a mythology all its own. You are a "we" with your brother before you are a "we" with any other. Even your parents' "we" can be turned against you.

Your brother, if there are only two of you, is your first peer, thus your template for later, adult relationships.

When your brother ventures out in the world, he represents you. If he is older, he may become your only way of being and appearing vicariously in a world that you are not yet allowed to enter. He represents, in this sense, your possibility of having a future and a wider social presence. Your pride in your brother is, in part, egoistic projection.

Through your brother, you also learn the limitations attached to self: the things you do less well, the meaning of "belonging" as a noun, the need to compete for attention, the space that opens up for you only after it's been vacated by your brother. In a sense, especially if you are the younger brother, you only begin to "own" yourself in your brother's absence. But his absence may haunt your aloneness.

Culturally speaking, I have an idea that I am at liberty to fight with my brother—indeed, it's expected—until someone attacks

either one of us. Then we will turn in unison on the attacker as one force redoubled. If there's a significant difference in age, then the older brother protects the younger with his fists and his power. But the younger brother protects the older with his admiration and love. It should be obvious who bears the greater responsibility.

In expansive affirmation of our fellow man, we sometimes call everyone "brothers." To designate a special friendship, or to invoke community and intimacy within a group, we again use the "brother" formula as a foundational myth of male fellowship.

My brother, Ted Kaczynski, once sent a bomb to an airline executive concealed in a hollowed-out copy of a book with the intriguing title *Ice Brothers*.

I don't remember a time when I wasn't aware that my brother was "special"—a tricky word that can mean either above or below average, or completely off the scale. Ted, seven and a half years older, was special because he was so intelligent. In the Kaczynski family, being intelligent carried high value. But at the time of Sputnik and the space race in the late 1950s, intelligence—especially technical and scientific intelligence—had a certain cultural panache as well. Ted was a "brain" to school-age children in our working-class neighborhood, where the word conferred status, but also a vague stigma since being too intelligent was linked to maladjustment, and most kids wanted to fit in.

As a young child beginning to gauge social perceptions, I thought of my brother as smart, independent, and principled. I heard myself described by our neighbors and aunts and uncles as charming, happy, and affectionate—as if those were traits to be remarked on in a child. Even at a tender age, I sensed that adults contrasted me with my brother. Heck, anyone could be the way I was, since it required no effort. But not everyone could be smart, independent, and principled

like my big brother. Given a choice, I would gladly have embraced Ted's persona and relinquished my own. I wanted to be like Ted.

Ted could be kind, but also critical.

When I was about three years old, our family moved from a dingy duplex in Chicago's Back of the Yards neighborhood (the "Yards" being the famous Chicago stockyards) to a house in Evergreen Park, a new working-class suburb on the city's southwest side. It was our first house. When summer came, I used to delight in pushing open the screen door and going out to play in our spacious backyard. It never rained that summer (in my memory, at least). I met other small boys and girls my own age. I was discovering a new world and having a ball. The only frustration came when I tried to re-enter the house, because I was too short to reach the door handle to pull open the screen door. I would often stand on the back patio—a tiny exile—calling for someone, Mom, Dad, or Ted, to let me in.

One day I saw Ted fiddling with something at the back door. He was about ten or eleven years old at the time but always an ingenious person. To this day, it somewhat mesmerizes me to watch someone drawing or performing some careful manual task, which I ascribe to my early interest in my brother's activities. He had taken a spool of thread from Mom's sewing kit, and a hammer and a nail from Dad's tool kit in the basement. I watched as he removed the last remnant of thread from the spool, leaving only the bare spool. Then he inserted the nail through the hole in the center of the spool and hammered it onto the wooden screen door. When he was finished, he said, "Dave, see if this works!" All of a sudden it dawned on me what he had done: he'd crafted a little makeshift door handle for me.

It seems that even after I grew taller and no longer needed it, the spool remained attached to the door for some time—a lingering reminder of my brother's kindness. A few tender memories like this one (and there were more than a few) soothe the

stings that inevitably come in a sibling relationship. Growing up, I never doubted my brother's fundamental loyalty and love, or felt the slightest insecurity in his presence.

Which is not to say that I always felt worthy in his presence.

It was never a challenge to win our parents' approval. Although humble about their own virtues and accomplishments, Mom and Dad seemed to glory in their two boys. I'm sure it was Ted who first clued me in that Mom and Dad's approval ratings were not objective. Once I said, "Aren't we lucky that we have the best parents in the world!" and he replied, "You can't prove that."

Sometimes I suspected that Ted was judging me, even when he said nothing. I wondered if I had done something wrong that I wasn't aware of. Once when he caught me in a fib, he said, "You liar!" and stalked off in contempt. I worried that I had disappointed him terribly, perhaps beyond hope of redemption.

Although I had placed Ted up on a pedestal—wanting to emulate his intellectual accomplishments, bragging to my fourth-grade buddies when he went to Harvard on a scholarship at sixteen—there was another part of me that sensed he was not completely OK.

I was probably seven or eight years old when I first approached Mom with the question, "What's wrong with Teddy?"

"What do you mean, David? There's nothing wrong with your brother."

"I mean, he doesn't have any friends. Why's that?"

"Well, you know, David, not everyone is the same. You have lots of friends because you like people and people like you. That's wonderful! You're a sociable person. But Teddy likes to spend more time by himself, reading and working on things. That's wonderful, too. He's different from you, but everyone doesn't have to be the same. It's OK to be different."

"I know but . . . sometimes it seems he doesn't *like* people."

Mom must have sensed that I needed more than reassurance. "Sit down, David, I want to talk to you about something that happened before you were born."

Mom and I sat down side by side on the couch, the same one she used to read me stories on—the Beatrix Potter series, *Wind in the Willows*, *Tom Sawyer*—and teach me about life through her explanations and commentaries. I always treasured this time with Mom for its intimacy and also for the world of imagination it opened for me. Sometimes she told me stories from her own life. But now she told me one about my brother's early life.

"When Teddy was a little baby just nine months old—before he was able to talk or understand us—he had to go to the hospital because of a rash that covered his little body. In those days, hospitals wouldn't let parents stay with a sick baby, and we were only allowed to visit him every other day for a couple of hours. I remember how your brother screamed in terror when I had to hand him over to the nurse, who took him away to another room. They had to stick lots of needles in Teddy, who was much too young to understand that everything being done to him was for his own good. He was terribly afraid, and he thought Dad and I had abandoned him to cruel strangers. He probably thought we didn't love him anymore and that we would never come back to bring him home again."

I really can't do justice to my mother's capacity for drama. Perhaps it was because of the stories and fairy-tales she read to me on that old couch, but Mom had a way of entering into the emotions of the scenes she described. By the time she finished, I was deeply moved. There were tears rolling down my cheeks as I thought about the terrible suffering my brother had endured when he was a little baby.

It was an important teaching moment, and Mom took advantage of it. "David, your brother doesn't remember what happened to him, I'm sure. He was much too young. But that hospital experience hurt him deeply, and the hurt never went away completely. One thing you must always remember is never to abandon your brother, because that's what he fears the most."

I promised Mom that I would never abandon Ted. She went on to describe her and Dad's patient efforts to help their

son heal from his hospital trauma—how after they brought him home from the hospital they spoke gently and cuddled him, and tried over and over to get him to smile back at them. It took a long time, she said, before Teddy resembled the happy baby he'd been before he had to go to the hospital.

Often as I grew older, the story of my brother's traumatic hospital experience would come to mind as I struggled to understand Ted's quirks or to forgive his occasional insensitivity. It helped me to realize that you can't understand someone without compassion.

One summer our father, Ted Sr., caught a baby rabbit in our backyard. He placed the little animal in a wooden cage that was covered with a screen top. Several neighborhood kids clustered around to gape at the rabbit, and our father seemed proud to show it off. Our family, after all, had a pronounced educational bent. Dad used to teach us how to identify plants. So it was only natural that he would take pleasure in exposing the neighborhood kids to an "educational" experience—the chance to view a wild animal up close. My friends were jockeying to get a good look.

Ted was the last kid to join the onlookers, evidently curious to see what all the fuss was about. But as soon as he glimpsed the little rabbit cowering in a corner of the cage, his reaction was instinctive: "Oh, oh, let it go!" he said with panicked urgency.

Suddenly, I saw everything differently. Only then did I notice that the young rabbit was trembling with fright. Only then did I realize that we were being cruel.

Dad, realizing that he had caused his sensitive son distress, quickly carried the cage to a wooded area across the street and released the rabbit into the wild.

When I was around seven, Dad finished our attic in beautiful knotty pine so that Ted, now in high school, could have his own bedroom. The change provided us both with space and a measure of independence. But it also afforded Ted an opportunity

to isolate himself from the family whenever he wanted, which turned out to be rather often.

Perhaps puzzled by the long hours Ted spent quietly in his room upstairs, I remember approaching Dad with the same question I'd once asked our mother: "What's wrong with Ted?"

My father pointed out that Ted's intellectual interests set him apart from most of his classmates. While Ted read books about relativity theory, they were listening to Elvis and going to sock-hops. Someday, Dad said, Ted would go off to college and meet other young people with similar interests. He would form close friendships, eventually marry and raise a family of his own. Ted would "find himself," Dad predicted—it just might take him a little longer.

Since Ted didn't seem to crave company, I always felt privileged and rewarded whenever he'd invite me up to his room to show me something—perhaps some ingenious mechanical contraption he had invented, or to view his coin collection and hear how he had acquired the more valuable coins, or to play duets he had composed using our cheap wooden recorders, or to hear him read a favorite story or poem. It was my brother who first introduced me to the stories and poems of Edgar Allan Poe. He once showed me a humorous drawing that he'd made of the emperor Napoleon making him appear quite crazed. To my preadolescent and later adolescent mind, it was all so wonderfully cool to have a big brother who would take me into his confidence. I treasured those times we spent together even more than I did our family vacations and excursions to the nearby forest preserve, I suppose because they felt more "special." My emotional bond with Ted was unique and very strong.

Ted left for Harvard at the age of sixteen. It never would have occurred to me that my brother would suffer as a result of social isolation there, because I had no idea that he needed anything from people. I thought of him as emotionally self-sufficient. I never imagined that he shared my "weakness" for human companionship, my need for social validation.

In high school, I sort of became my brother—or at least tried to. I made myself into the class "brain," concentrating on math just like Ted. Although I had a few friends, all National Honor Society types, I grew more socially aloof and never dated. Once an all-star second baseman in our local Little League, I dropped baseball to concentrate on academics. I took an overload of courses so I could graduate in three years. On graduation day, I was sixteen, not much older than Ted had been on his graduation day. I even applied to Harvard and felt very disappointed when my application was rejected. But by then I already knew that I was no match for my brilliant older brother. I may have been an intellectual star at Evergreen Park Community High School, but judging from the way the older faculty members swapped stories about my brother's brilliance, it was clear that Ted was one of a kind, an academic legend.

In May or June of my senior year in high school, Ted was home on vacation from his Ph.D. program at the University of Michigan. One afternoon, I showed him a calculus problem that I'd solved after a long, persistent struggle. Ted, who was also a teaching assistant at Michigan, was impressed. "I'd guess that if I assigned the same problem to my upper-level calculus class, probably no one would be able to solve it." I was thrilled by his praise. I felt as if I had just moved into the select company of a few smart people whom Ted would naturally admire. He seemed proud of me.

In many ways, the next ten years or so were our closest as brothers. At least, that's how I experienced them. But I also felt myself gradually drifting away from Ted. We spent a month one summer camping together on Michigan's Upper Peninsula. We spent a summer traveling across western Canada looking for a piece of land for Ted to homestead after he abruptly quit his professor's job at the University of California at Berkeley in 1969. In 1971—after an unsuccessful attempt to get a Canadian homestead permit—Ted followed me to Montana where I had migrated after college. He suggested that we pool our resources

to buy a parcel of land, which turned out to be the 1.4 acre plot six miles outside of Lincoln, where he built his now iconic 10′ × 12′ cabin and where he lived a seemingly inoffensive hermit's life for the next twenty-five years.

Once, invoking his vision of an ideal society, he described to me hunter-gatherer communities based on reciprocity and trust, "you know . . . like our family." If someone had told me that in another five years Ted would be writing letters of bitter recrimination to our parents, I would have been surprised to say the least. As late as the late 1970s, he invited me to join him in a quest for remote land in the Canadian wilderness where we might live together far from the bane of civilization. By then, however, it was clear to me that I would be quite unhappy with my life shrunk to one relationship with my civilization-hating brother.

On one hand, a change in how I saw my brother was inevitable. Most adoring younger brothers take their older brothers off their pedestal at some point. Idols show their clay feet eventually. In a healthy relationship, disillusioned hero-worship is replaced by mature affection—and there certainly were a lot of qualities to like in Ted. He was still smart, independent, and principled. There was also, by this time, a kind of despondency in him that I found very poignant. He didn't want any of the things most people crave: being loved and admired, having money, comfort, or worldly success. In his humility and integrity, he resembled the saints of old—except that his asceticism was completely disconnected from faith, love, or hope. On the contrary, it seemed haunted by a sorry defeatism. I also sensed that he expected me to live the same way and to share his deeply pessimistic views.

When I left Montana to take a job teaching high school English in the Midwest in 1973, my mother asked a typically worried question, "Did you say goodbye to Ted before you left?"

Her question caught me up short, and I answered a little defensively: "Well, he knew I was going." I would have had to drive 180 miles round-trip to see Ted, I told her. In the back of my mind, I was thinking that I couldn't spend the rest of my life

shackled to my brother. He never said that he needed me anyway. Mom was expecting too much, I fretted. But I also remembered my early promise never to abandon my brother. Did it feel to him, perhaps subconsciously, that I was abandoning him now?

Ted's angry—well, blistering—letters to our parents started arriving in the late 1970s. The gist was that he was unhappy all his life because Mom and Dad had never truly loved him. They pushed him academically to feed their own egos. They never taught him appropriate social skills because they didn't care about his happiness. These letters were not an invitation to talk, but an indictment, filled with highly dramatized and—in my view—distorted memories. Yet Ted's conclusion, in his own mind, was as rock solid as a mathematical proof.

At first, I thought he had simply lost his temper. After all, he was emotionally intense and spent nearly all his time alone. He'd given up a promising but unfulfilling academic career to live in the woods—and still he wasn't happy. So it was not surprising that he could lose his grip and say some things he didn't really mean. It could happen to almost anyone.

But when I wrote to Ted, hoping that he would appreciate the pain his letter had caused our parents and apologize, I received a series of increasingly disturbed replies that convinced me that he hadn't just lost his temper: every recrimination he'd flung at Mom and Dad was based in a fixed belief system. I was surely Ted's closest human contact, yet I'd never seen any of this coming. And now, nothing I said could shake Ted's judgment of Mom and Dad in the slightest. At one point he warned me that if I continued defending Mom and Dad, he'd cut me out of his life as well. Once he did so, he said, it would be forever.

For the next ten years, more or less, I thought I might persuade Ted to see things differently. There were occasional crises that made me think my brother might be seriously ill. But each time he seemed to recover, more or less. There was a discernible pattern: I never saw any crisis looming, and Ted never wanted to discuss them afterwards. Looking back now, there was also a

downward spiral. There were more and more topics we couldn't discuss because discussing them made Ted upset. There was an undertone of stress in the letters we regularly exchanged, based for me in my brother's harsh treatment of our parents. Ted wanted me to agree with him about everything. I wanted to defend my own ego as an independent person. But most of all, I wanted to defend Mom and Dad against Ted's cruel opinion of them. It upset me to realize that I was not going to change my brother's mind.

My marriage to Linda was the proverbial straw as far as Ted was concerned. Maybe he understood—whether consciously or not—the implications of bringing another fresh, intelligent mind into the family. Perhaps, too, it forced him to see his little brother differently. In any case, it was Linda who made me confront the growing evidence that my brother was suffering from a mental disorder. "But that's the way he thinks!" I protested at first. I remember her then pointing to a bizarre passage in a letter I'd just received. "David, read this. People who are healthy in their minds don't think like this."

My feelings toward Ted shifted after I read the "Unabomber's Manifesto" in the *Washington Post* and began coming to grips with the horrific possibility that Ted might be the long-sought serial bomber. Again, it was Linda who pried open my mind; Linda who urged me to read the Manifesto. I never considered that Ted was capable of violence. In fact, my only fear along those lines was the haunting worry that he might someday kill himself.

Suddenly, it felt as if my brother and I were central characters in a grandiose tragedy. I began to discern a frightening symmetry in our lives that led me to the terrible dilemma that Linda and I then faced: do nothing and run the risk that Ted might kill again, or turn him in and accept the likelihood that he would be executed for his crimes.

The alternatives looked too stark to be true, more like literature than life. Looking back over our lives as brothers, I began to

see how every step led us to this terrible juncture. Suddenly, I felt trapped inside the narrative of our lives, my identity forever defined by the fate of being Ted Kaczynski's brother. I wanted out of that role. I wanted to make my own choices in life, not have them foisted upon me. I wanted to create my own life's story. And yet to choose to do nothing was itself a choice. There was no escape. I was boxed in by the awful dilemma we faced as well as by my relationship to Ted. Suddenly, and for some time, I felt engulfed in a vision of the universe as dark as Ted's.

At the same time, my resentment of Ted strangely melted away. My ordinary frame of reference in thinking about him no longer made sense. There was just emptiness and deep pity in my heart where my brother had been.

It has occurred to me that Ted and I are almost like disowned parts of each other. Ted the Unabomber represents the violence and pessimism that I reject. David, the semi-famous "moral hero," represents the inauthenticity of hope in a world gone fundamentally awry. Ted's cruelty stigmatizes my good name; but my reputation for goodness comes at his expense. Like all contrived opposites, we reinforce one another. The worst thing he can do to me is deny any opportunity for reconciliation. Hope of reconciliation is something I am bound to maintain, but it costs me little—only the sneaking intuition that an important part of me is missing.

I'm beginning to see the outline of a developmental scheme in this brothers' motif. As a young kid I had lots of boyhood pals, almost like temporary brothers my own age who would come and go out of my life. Unlike my real brother, they turned out to be replaceable. Many of my post–high school friendships, however, endured much longer. I spent four years with the same college roommate, and we've grown even closer over the years. If something ever happened to Joel, I would grieve as much as I would for Ted. Our conversations pick up just where they leave off, even after a gap of years. I discover in my friend much of the openness and reciprocity that I never found in Ted. He was

there for me in my worst hour. There is a level of trust and respect between us that makes the whole world seem stable and sane at its core, simply because this kind of relationship is possible. I suppose it's what Martin Buber named the "Thou."

Several months after Ted's arrest, I made contact with one of my brother's surviving victims—Gary Wright, of Salt Lake City, Utah. In one sense, he represented someone whose experience of the Unabomber saga was the polar opposite of mine. Part of me desperately needed to open a door to that "other side"—the victim's side. Ted would not talk to me, and neither—not surprisingly—would most of his victims or their family members. A lot of worlds got shattered by Ted's bombs. Probably it was foolish—even self-indulgent of me—to imagine that I could reassemble any of those pieces in the hope of making my world whole again. But with incredible grace, Gary volunteered to help me. In the ten years since our first awkward phone conversation, we too have become as close and indispensable to one another as brothers.

On the evening of September 11, 2001, I was home alone in Schenectady. Linda was away in Illinois caring for her sick parents. We were terribly worried about Linda's brother and his wife, whose apartment in lower Manhattan was not far from the World Trade Center site; and also about our niece attending college in Philadelphia, cut off from news of her parents because of the telephone outage. I suppose being the brother of a so-called "terrorist" made the events of that day more disturbing, if possible, than they otherwise would have been for me. I learned from Linda that our sister-in-law had been on the phone with Linda's mother when she saw the second tower fall. Then the phone line was cut off. I managed to reach my niece at her dorm room and found her as sane and sensible as always, somehow managing to give back more reassurance than she took. I couldn't bear to watch the news. But the silence felt equally unbearable. I wondered what my brother might be thinking about all of this.

The phone rang again. "Hey Dave, it's so good to hear your voice! I know you take a lot of trips to New York City. I'm so glad to know that you're OK."

It was Gary Wright.

On a night when just about everyone in America was checking in with their closest family and friends, Gary Wright made a call to the brother of the man who'd tried to kill him. It was reassuring to know that I lived in a world where such a call was possible. In that moment, I knew that Gary would be my friend for life.

Gary and I are virtual "blood brothers." Our bond forged through violence is as powerful and deep as any other. We also share a base of values. Our bond is a bond of choice as much as a bond of happenstance. Tragedy has given us both an unexpected gift. My life is infinitely richer because of Gary's friendship. Nothing can compensate me for losing Ted, but I find a poetic balance in having gained a new brother in Gary. Our choices end up reshaping the universe—at least the universe we know.

No one lives a life without loss. Loss of loved ones. Loss of innocence. Loss of dreams and hopes. Loss of each precious moment as quickly as it passes. Loss of our own lives in the end.

Sometimes, I'll be driving down the road, glance in the mirror, and for a split second I'll see Ted driving the car behind me. A moment later, I realize it's just another guy with a beard. A guy with a completely different mind and a life all his own. Anyone could be my brother, I realize, if fate had just arranged things a little differently. No matter—a flood of memories rushes in. So many memories: some sad, some anxious, some happy and loving, but all of them hauntingly poignant. What happened to those two little boys who grew up together in a different, more hopeful world in 1950s America? Or to the young men who spent an entire summer camping together in western Canada in 1969? Back then, I never could have imagined my life without Ted.

As we were driving back from Canada to Illinois in August 1969, I was feeling eager to return home, thinking about regular

baths, Mom's home cooking, an opportunity to catch up on the world's news, perhaps even a chance to see Linda before she returned to school. I wanted to rejoin the stream of my life after this memorable detour. Ted and I were camped out in a county park in the grasslands of Nebraska, lying on our backs side by side, gazing up at the immense, starry sky as warm summer breezes stirred the tall grass around us.

"I wish we were home," I said.

"Really? I wish we didn't have to go back," Ted said.

It was a defining difference. But now I agree with him, wishing we could live that moment again.